

ALICE
NIELSEN IN
"THE SINGING GIRL"
ACT II

ZANGWILL, "THE PECK-SNIFF OF JUDAISM."

By Alan Dale.

HERE is one member of "the Zangwill plays" cast at the Herald Square Theatre who appeared in an equally vulgar, irreverent and pitiful Jewish parody at the Star Theatre nearly ten years ago. I refer to Miss Rosabel Morrison, who played in that other anti-Semitic abomination, "The Shatchen" (marriage broker). This precious failure was the work of Henry Dobbin and Charles Dickson, and it "introduced" Mr. Dickson as "a commercial tourist," M. B. Curtis as "the shatchen," Lewis Morrison as a "wealthy clothier," and Miss Rosabel as a banker's daughter. Like "the Zangwill play," "The Shatchen" held up to ridicule the Mosaic traditions and hurled an English jargon at the ears of its audience. Its principal humor dealt with the furtive ham sandwich, and its comedy hovered around the Deuteronomic laws of diet—laws so absolutely founded on science that non-Jewish medical men can be found to uphold them to-day. "The Shatchen" proved to be a wretched failure, although, like "the Zangwill play," it enlisted the services of able people such as Lewis Morrison (of whom New York sees too little) and of poor Sophie Eyre. But Messrs. Dobbin and Dickson made no such rapid pretensions of Zionist fervor as the egregious Mr. Zangwill professes. They didn't calumniate themselves as a sort of Messiah, with the nose turned heavenward and the hand dabbling in the box office. They offered up their race follies for money in a candid manner. They declined to pose, like Zangwill, as the Pecksniff of Judaism. There was no "affaire Dreyfus" upon which they could trapeze themselves into prominence like unto that which the Jewish Pecksniff has been able to elicitly use.

Jewish playgoers form a large percentage of the theatre-goers of this metropolis. When Pecksniff Zangwill announced that his "play" was the only thing in the city not backed by Jewish capital he was unconsciously playing into the very hands that he attempted to paralyze.

If Pecksniff was "turned down" by the Frohman-Hayman contingent, let me tell him that the Frohman-Hayman contingent have done nothing that will make them stronger with their adherents. It would be the last straw that broke the camel's back if we heard that Hebrew capital had been used to exploit the belittlement of Hebrew traditions. Pecksniff, by his bitterness, had evidently hawked his Baxter street wares in the wrong market. Jewish capital would certainly decline to lend itself to "the Zangwill play."

It is Jewish capital that backed the really artistic and reverent Jewish play "The Ghetto" at the Broadway Theatre. But this drama, inconceivably more lofty in its aims than the Yiddish farce comedy fathered by Pecksniff, was too serious to succeed. Will the Hebrews who found even an ennobling Jewish theme unattractive lend themselves to one that jeers at and grins at the superstitions of their ancestors? What would the Roman Catholics say if one of their "lights" arose and, after a lot of hypothetical palaver about his mission and his supreme beliefs, wrote an extravaganza on the subject of the Roman Catholic confessional, with little farcical allusions to exhalation, "supers" in the shape of monks, nuns, lay brothers and lay sisters, and scenes laid in a Benedictine convent? What would the Roman Catholics say if they were asked to go to the theatre and see a mixed audience of amusement seekers and laughter mongers treated to some little replete dissertations on the ceremony of kissing the Pope's slipper? How vastly entertaining to get the holy water font dramatized, and a crowd of Bowers "extras" at \$6 per sprinkling themselves for the delectation of the gallery? How edifying, how ennobling, yes, how true and how original!

How long think you that such a cruel travesty would run at a Broadway playhouse? My idea is that it would not enjoy a career of one consecutive night. There would be such a rumour in a playhouse that dared to offer to a rude secular assemblage the external observances of the ritual that the luckless players would probably be hooted from the stage. Mrs. Humphry Ward has never dramatized her superb novel "Helbeck of Helmsdale," which deals with Roman Catholicism, and which is undoubtedly the finest and most thoughtful thing that this wonderful woman ever wrote. Mrs. Ward is far too sensible to attempt to offer up this sort of thing in a playhouse. It was not Mrs. Humphry Ward who dramatized "Robert Bismarck." It was William Gillette, who has succeeded better since he left religion alone. "Robert Bismarck" as a play was an ignominious failure when it was done at the Union Square Theatre. Mrs. Ward's admirable picture of the minister who regarded Christ as human, lovable and miracle-less, and her character drawing of the effect of this upon a austere and bigoted wife, was disfigured by a "dramatic offering." You saw a fat, podgy young minister in evening dress uttering tirades. And when he let Murell's history, the audience thought it a case of good riddance of bad rubbish. Was "The Ghetto" a success? No. The novel was handled very thinly. A vast fear of offending Roman Catholics by a too slavish adherence to Mrs. Voght's story caused the gist of the novel to be eliminated. The result was a flabby, pallid pudding that interested nobody, which was perhaps better than a play that would have injured a good many.

A man's religion belongs to himself. He inherits it and he does with it as he thinks fit. Modern Jews may be lax, but if you stir them up on the subject of their laxness, you stir up a very real and impenetrable poise. "I once knew a man," says somebody in "The Tyranny of Tears," "who interfered between husband and wife. The husband and wife got a black eye apiece. The man who interfered got two." And so it is with Hebrews. They may discuss among themselves the Mosaic laws and Deuteronomic observances in which their progenitors indulged, but the man who attempts to settle these discussions will not be thanked for his pains.

The farce-comedy types in the first act of "the Zangwill play"—the best act in the piece—are the very types which self-respecting Hebrews despise. The lone commercial traveller who has made his profession obnoxious—the terrible old woman, loud-mouthed, vulgar and oppressive; the hypocritical old poet with the Tabnaid always on his lips, and the odious spouters of a dialect that offends the ears and jars upon the nerves, would be the very people who would render the population of Jerusalem by a refined sect impossible. They are on the stage simply to create laughter. There is no ennobling sentiment about them. The old baron who declines to let Esther pocket the seventeen and sixpence given her by the card players, and who hands a guinea from her own pocket, is one of those manifold bits of clapnetism that might possibly make an appeal to a gallery. Pecksniff will probably tell you that he presents these people

MAY IRWIN
AS "SISTER MAY"

"THE DAIRY FARM" ON THE STAGE.

By Miss Jessie Wood.

H I more or less frequent intervals versatile genius start up from the West—or sometimes from the East—or from some obscurity which has no geographical significance and pass away a short period of time at one of the downtown playhouses. These geniuses generally, write, act and praise their own plays. They generally have husbands, wives, brothers and children employed in the production. I do not know if they paint their own scenery, but I am pretty certain that they make their own gowns; and it must be a matter of great regret to them that they can't hop down and take a fiddle in the orchestra between singing a sentimental ballad and being turned out of the old home into the cold night.

I am reminded of the young man who appeared at the Star Theatre not long since who wrote himself a lovely, noble part, acted it for one brief week and then disappeared like the snow in a quick thaw.

Like the pins, where do all these energetic meteors vanish to? Another one has this week appeared upon the dramatic firmament, and her name is Miss Eleanor Merron. This lady has written a bucolic drama upon the old lines. It contains the implacable mortgage, the squire with the heart of adamant, the old home out of which the young man who marries for love is turned, and the cold night into which he is turned. There are the old slaves, and the villagers who live in the village street, and the villagers who are leached by said villagers and who thrive on it; the bashful lover and the hearty soubrette. Miss Merron says that the whole thing is true to life, and also adds modestly that it is "pure, sweet and wholesome."

It seems rather a waste of time for me to linger in criticism over "this sweet little spot in our fevered life, since Miss Merron has labelled it so neatly for us. But I really cannot have this indefatigable lady taking the bread out of my mouth in this sweeping manner. I don't object so much to her taking the soubrette role, though I dare say some sweet girl on the Rialto is going without rufouser's earlier buckles through Miss Merron's versatility. But I cannot allow the precedent to be established of author-actor's self criticism without a protest. Why, we would be having Mansfield writing neat, sarcastic little squibs of self-approval and Anna Held inscribing a few choice words of complacent commendation in her best French on her own programmes. I would not have Miss Merron think that I am an unfriendly critic; she is an optimist, and says in her own little "boom" that "she hopes every man will go away feeling benefited by the laugh of pure good nature." She is unsophisticated, or else she would know that critics never laugh; bless you, Eleanor, they have their reputations to keep up. The only occasions on which critics laugh is when the author of a play that is unmistakably a "frost" makes a speech in which he thanks the frozen public for its kind appreciation of his little efforts. Then the critics laugh fendishly, but not at chains of tobacco and hoop skirts and the doll babies whose advent has made mamma "very delicate." We have these very often. They may be pure and sweet and wholesome; you cannot doubt that a play is wholesome when a seventy-nine-cent, stiff-jointed doll is brought in to soften an old man's heart. But these sweet, pure plays are so much like breakfast cereals—baby food. And the poor cricket rubes from French bedsteads to rag babies, and seldom finds anything between tobacco and hominy.

I do not know how many of the players in the "Dairy Farm" cast are the usual husbands and sisters of the author, but, as a rule, the work is well done. Perry Finkett is a hard, stern, old squire, and is melted very effectively by the rag doll. Jean Clara Walters is about the most capable woman in the cast, while Charles Hallock, as the young man who is turned out into "the night," is a rather mature looking person to be so rash and unprepared. Grace Hopkins shared the night with him, and she was the quintessence of melodrama, with all nature carefully strained out. Katherine Carlisle was a very poor copy of Mrs. Malaprop, and Arthur Sanders and J. H. Hollingshead were partners in crime. They simply doted on the mortgage.

Bertha St. Clair, whose complexion as a negro suffered from the hot afternoon and ran rather recklessly down her neck, sang "Backward, Turn Backward, Oh, Time, in Your Flight," and made some ladies in the third row cry. Paul Taylor played a bashful lover very well, and a fat young lady named Nelly Russell showed some talent.

Miss Eleanor Merron herself was the star and permeated the production. She is not at all a bad actress, and I really think if she dropped writing sweet-pure, cheese-cream dramas, and felt that the task of criticism might be left in the hands of those persons hired for the job, that she might do something clever and not entirely cream-cheesy.

As a playwright she is not a shining light, for it is not the homely truth, Miss Merron, that makes a good play, and whether you locate your myriads in Old Hurley or your rounders in the newest bohemian resort, a fig care you audience for the authenticity of the language.

As for her chance as a critic, her style is sweet, but partial, and optimistic in the extreme. I think, on the whole, that of the three professions she dabbles in this week the histrionic holds most for her.

JESSIE WOOD.

for what they are. Perhaps he does. But a drama written to please the English and peopled exclusively with Whitechapel costermongers would scarcely be looked upon as an undiluted intellectual treat. A play—particularly a religious play—should have some elevated object in view. A mere photograph of Baxter street, with its decaying vegetable barrels, its fat, lumpy matrons, and its jargon-talking men, might be tolerated from a vitascopic, cinematographic point of view. As the work of a gentleman who writes about the persecution of his race and stands in a perpetual pose, with a wreath of calcium lights around his tangled mane, it is somewhat ridiculous and, at the same time, dispiriting. Non-Jewish people may possibly regard it as a grim exposure of tedious savagery. "The Zangwill play" might have disarmed criticism had it been interesting, or thrilling, or cynical, or clever.

Its projectors are already advertising it as "much discussed." The tragedy of the woman who was murdered and cut up very recently is also "much discussed." So is the Boer war. So was the yacht race. "Much discussed" means precious little from the successful dramatic standpoint.

"Mr. Pecksniff was a moral man," said Dickens. "Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr. Pecksniff, especially in conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds that fell from his lips they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously." Yes, Zangwill is the Pecksniff of Judaism.

ALAN DALE.

JULIA MARLOWE
AND ARNOLD DAILY IN
"BARBARA FREITCHIE"

ACT III

EMMY SCHROTHAE
IN "THE SINGING GIRL"
ACT II

PAULA EDWARDS
AT THE
"VICTORIA"

MISS MAY LINCK IN
"AIDA"

ETHEL BARRYMORE
IN "HIS EXCEL-
LENCY THE
GOVERNOR"